

*How far METHODISM conduces to the Interests of
Christianity, and the Welfare of Society;
Impartially considered,*

IN A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT

THE VISITATION,

OF THE RIGHT REVEREND FATHER IN GOD,

WILLIAM, LORD BISHOP OF CHESTER;

HOLDEN AT

BOROUGHBRIDGE, IN YORKSHIRE,


SEPTEMBER 2, 1794.

BY THE REV. SAMUEL CLAPHAM, M. A. *R*



PRINTED BY J. BINNS,

AND SOLD BY J. JOHNSON, AND J. DEIGHTON, LONDON;
J. AND J. MERRILLS, CAMBRIDGE, AND J. FLETCHER, OXFORD.


PRICE ONE SHILLING.

How far METHODISM conduces to the interests of
Civilization, and the Welfare of Society,
especially in India.

IN A

SERMON

PREACHED AT

THE ALTAR



OF THE RIGHT

WILLIAM, LORD BISHOP OF CHESTER.

HOLDEN AT

BOROUGHBRIDGE, IN YORKSHIRE,

SEPTEMBER 2, 1804.

BY THE REV. SAMUEL CLAPHAM, M.A.



PRINTED BY J. BURNS

AND SOLD BY J. JOHNSON, AND J. BRIGHTON LONDON;
AND J. MERRILL, CAMBRIDGE, AND J. FLETCHER, OXFORD.

PRICE ONE SHILLING.


TO
THE RIGHT REVEREND
WILLIAM CLEAVER, D. D.
LORD BISHOP OF CHESTER,
THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE,
PREACHED AND PUBLISHED BY HIS COMMAND,
IS, WITH THE UTMOST RESPECT, INSCRIBED
BY HIS LORDSHIP'S
MOST DUTIFUL AND OBLIGED SERVANT,
THE PREACHER.

YARM, September 10, 1794.

TO
THE RIGHT REVEREND
WILLIAM OLIVER, D. D.
LORD BISHOP OF CHESTER
THE POIL
PREACHED AND PUBLISHED BY HIS COMMAND
IS, WITH THE UTMOST RESPECT, INSCRIBED
BY HIS LORDSHIP'S
MOST OBTUPEL AND OBLIGED SERVANT,
THE PREACHER.



S E R M O N, &c.


I CORINTHIANS, I CHAP. 10 VERSE,

I BESEECH YOU BRETHREN BY THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THAT YE ALL SPEAK THE SAME THING; THAT THERE BE NO DIVISIONS AMONG YOU; BUT THAT YE BE PERFECTLY JOINED TOGETHER IN THE SAME MIND, AND IN THE SAME JUDGEMENT.

THE slightest acquaintance with the history of Christianity will convince us, that, from its infancy, through all succeeding ages to the present period, it has been uniformly opposed by the power of interest, and misrepresented by the clamour of ignorance. Though it was offered to the understandings of men, “not in the enticing words of man’s wisdom, “but in demonstration of the spirit, and with power;” yet those to whom it was so graciously proposed, instead of “receiving it with meekness,” studying its doctrines with care, and practising its precepts with sincerity, were too prone to measure its design by their own narrow prejudices, and accommodate its language
to

temper to the purposes of vain and useless contention. The same spirit has continued to prevail. For though the apostle deprecates divisions as destructive of a Christian Spirit, and injurious to Christianity itself; and beseeches the professors of the Gospel "by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they would all "speak the same thing;" yet so fond are men of distinctions, so ambitious of appearing in the little circle of their neighbours at the head of a sect, that the entreaties of the apostle, the peace of the Church, the honor of our holy religion, are sacrificed with indecent clamour, and unhallowed precipitation to their unruly and ungovernable passions.

each When St. Paul wrote his masterly epistle to the Corinthians, the Church which he had planted in that city was endangered by the Gentile, and the Jewish converts; each ambitiously called themselves believers in Christ, and each mischievously perverted the truth which Christ had revealed. The Gentile was captivated by the philosophical subtleties and rhetorical ornaments, which Apollos, it should seem, had introduced into his method of teaching. The Jew contended for the necessity of ceremonial observances, and pleaded for his opinion the authority of Cephas. *both* To the plain, solid, and salutary instructions which they had received from St. Paul, they were equally inattentive; and while they censured each other for holding erroneous tenets, they were themselves equally involved in error, and equally guilty of uncharitableness. St. Paul therefore, with distinguished propriety, addresses them, not in the name of Apollos, whom they admired; not in the name of Cephas, whom they misunderstood; but in the name of their common and acknowledged master, Jesus Christ.* He bids them "speak the same thing;" he deprecates the divisions which had grown up among them; he

* See Pyle's excellent Note on the Passage.

he exhorts them " to be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment." Their minds had been previously instructed, and their judgments enlightened by the doctrines which St. Paul himself had preached; and in recurring to those doctrines they would have found an unerring rule to guide their opinions, and a most efficacious principle for healing their divisions. The strife and envy of which the Apostle afterwards speaks so feelingly; the backbiting, swellings, whispering, and tumult, which he describes so forcibly, would soon have been done away, if they had been willing to reflect upon his doctrine, and submit to his authority. In respect to themselves, humility would have taken place of pride; in respect to their believing brethren, forbearance would have succeeded to malignity; in respect to the general cause of Christianity itself, instead of being dishonored by their strife, it would have been strengthened by their union.

In man, considered as a rational being, the desire of discovering truth is highly becoming; the attempt to discover it is even incumbent on him as a moral creature; the actual discovery of it is facilitated by a spirit of impartiality and candour; and the utility of it, when discovered, is more extensive, where the same diligent and dispassionate enquiry has conducted men to the same clear and consistent decision. But if these observations be just, as they generally regard our duty and our happiness, they are peculiarly important in the discussion of those subjects, which are connected with religion. Every difficulty is there increased by a contentious temper; every advantage is there heightened by a sincere and steady disposition " to speak the same thing, and to " be joined together in the same mind."

I would not however be understood to say, that because divisions

visions are pernicious to the interests of the Gospel, we should therefore implicitly embrace, and passively retain opinions which credulity may have taken up, and error sanctioned; but it is surely incumbent on us, before we embroil the peace of society, to propose our doubts with modesty, and discuss them with forbearance. *indeed* If men are morally certain, that by the introduction *own* of their tenets, TRUTH, with all her train of virtues, will gain admission to the exclusion of error, and the suppression of vice, they are then justified in proclaiming their dissent from opinions, however long received, or widely disseminated, or firmly established; but if, on the contrary, they are actuated by disappointment or pride; or if the utility of their scheme be uncertain or precarious, the ardour which they profess for the reformation of mankind, is a plea quite insufficient to justify the schism which they deliberately excite.

I shall be entitled, I hope, to your indulgence, if I in some measure deviate from the common topics which are generally chosen on occasions similar to the present by my Reverend Brethren. The leading principles of their professional duties are, I am sure, distinctly understood by the audience I have the honor to address; and I trust that the subject I have chosen for our more immediate consideration, will not be thought wholly unconnected with those duties, as they affect the credit of our sacred office, and the noblest interests of society. I shall therefore solicit your patient attention, whilst I advert to a notorious and dangerous division made in the Established Church, by a description of men, generally distinguished by the denomination of METHODISTS.

I shall first consider what good, whether real, or supposed, both

Both to Christianity and to Society, has accrued from the introduction of their doctrines.

Secondly, What are the evils, whether inherent in, or resulting from them?

Thirdly, Why Methodism has so increased, and by what means it is supported; from which some observations will, in conclusion, naturally arise, which your candour may perhaps dispose you to consider as not unsuitable to the design of our present meeting.

I am compelled to premise, that the most candid investigation of Methodism has always provoked from its professors the most perverse cavils, and outrageous reproaches. In whatever view you consider it, you are from that moment abhorred, or despised, or pitied by the whole society. This circumstance is surely suspicious. If their system of religion be founded on truth, the more it is examined the greater cause they will have of rejoicing; if on error, the sooner they are convinced of their mistake, the higher must be their obligation to those who discover to them the uncertain foundation on which their edifice is raised. But I have been repeatedly told by some of their most distinguished members, that could they even be convinced that Methodism is a delusion, it is so pleasing and so comfortable, they would still continue in it. We, my brethren, will act a contrary part. We will divest ourselves of every prejudice. We will not withhold from them that justice which we wish to receive at their hands. We will consider fairly and impartially how far their tenets promote the interests of Christianity—how far they conduce to the real welfare of Society, as we believe it will appear, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, and when every good man, of whatever persuasion, shall have praise of God.

B

I. Their

I. Their first claim upon our attention is, that they preach the word of God in its genuine purity. Acting under the immediate inspiration of the holy Ghost, receiving from him what they must say, and how they must speak, they are, in general, under the direction of an infallible guide. Why, after the ordinary assistances of the Divine Spirit have been for so many ages granted in aid of human attainments, the Almighty should entertain for the* ignorant and illiterate, an exclusive predilection; why he should confine his inspirations to those who are, for the most part,† incapable of sound reasoning, and enlarged comprehension, is a question which defies the solution of human ingenuity. From this persuasion of divine illumination, they preach the doctrines of remission of sins, instantaneous in its operations, and complete in its effects, and of the certain knowledge of the day and hour, when they first received the holy Spirit—when they ceased to be sons of Belial, and became children

* The modern fanatics, says a sagacious and acute observer, pretend to as high a degree of divine communications as if no rule of faith was in being; or, at least, as if that rule was so obscure as to need the further assistance of the holy Spirit to explain his own meaning; or so imperfect as to need a new inspiration to supply its wants. —But these men read the history of the dispensations to the first propagators of our holy faith: they look with admiration on the privileges and powers conferred on those chosen instruments: their imaginations grow heated: they forget the difference between the *present* and the *past* œconomy of things: they seem to feel the impressions they read of; and they assume the airs, and mimic the authority of prophets and apostles.—See *Bishop Warburton on Grace*, 112th page.

† It was a celebrated maxim of the Jews, says Dr. Whitby on the 26th verse of the 1st chap. of the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, that “prophecy resides not but upon a wise, a strong, and a rich man.” The Methodists seem to have inverted this maxim in two instances, and to believe that peculiar illuminations are given to the ignorant and the poor.

children of light.* *I felt faith in Christ*, says the founder of the sect, *and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even MINE?* *Oh what sweet communion*, says another distinguished preacher, *"who went out from us," had I daily vouchsafed from God.* † *I am carried by our dear Saviour from day to day—I lean on Jesus's bosom from morning to night, yea, all the day long.* ‡

On these extraordinary passages, allow me to make this single observation: if they are to be understood literally, they are not correspondent to the tenor of scripture; if figuratively, what could have been the intention of the writers, but by investing their system with dazzling pomp, and awful solemnity, to excite in their more ignorant readers, the expectation of personal communication with the Deity, immediately and sensibly present. ||

B 2

Whether

* "Every gift of the Spirit, as well as faith, cometh by hearing; and that not in the instant, but by degrees; for the Gospel does not illuminate and sanctify men AT ONCE; but by successive improvements, according to the care with which we listen to its admonitions, and the impression they make upon us. One truth received prepares the mind to entertain a second; that, a third; and so on, 'till we become perfect in the knowledge of the faith. Our moral advances are made in the same manner: one good resolution begets another, which again produces succeeding ones, 'till through several intervening states, we arrive, or almost arrive at perfect obedience." — See *Bishop Hurd's Sermons*, vol. 2, page 9.

* Wesley's Journal. † Whitfield's Journal. ‡ Letters.

|| That the operations of the holy Spirit can be distinguished from the workings of our own mind, no rational and enlightened christian will, I apprehend, take upon him to affirm. That such distinction, even in Mr. Whitfield's estimation is not easy, appears from his own words. "Alas! Alas! in how many things have I judged and acted wrong! Being fond of scripture language, I
" have

Whether the dissemination of such doctrines promotes the interests of Christianity, you, my Reverend Brethren, may be perhaps so sceptical as to doubt; because it will probably appear to your minds inconsistent with the revelation* God has made of himself, and with the general tenor of his dealings toward the children of men. Their own *experience*, the only testimony the Methodists have to offer, is not, I think, perfectly intelligible as a fact, nor altogether conclusive as an evidence. Besides, we do not find in the writings—or if, in compliance with their prejudices, I use so indeterminate an expression, *the experience* of the most distinguished of our Church, men, whose talents have defended, and whose piety has adorned Christianity, any intimation of such near and personal communion with God.†

Grounded as is this persuasion in their minds, we cannot wonder that it should be the constant subject of their sermons, and the general theme of their conversation; but as it is confined almost exclusively

“ have often used a style *too apostolical*, and at the same time I have been *too bitter* in my zeal. Wild fire has been mixed with it; and I find I have frequently “ wrote and spoke too much in my own spirit, when I thought I was writing and speaking entirely by the assistance of the Spirit of God,” &c.—What is this but an open acknowledgement that Methodism is a delusion?

* They err, not knowing the scriptures, who from this or the like passages—“ the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God,” imagine that the Spirit ever gives or was designed to give INWARD ASSURANCE OF CERTAINTY to men of THEIR FINAL STATE.—See *Bishop Sherlock's Sermons*, vol. 1st, ser. 8th. On the just application of Scripture.—See an admirable Sermon by *Mr. Archdeacon Paley*.

† In the writings of Clarke, Jortin, Sherlock, Skelton, Secker, Leland, Hurd, and Porteus, men whose learning is equalled only by their piety, we meet with on such arrogant presumption.

exclusively to themselves;* you who study the scriptures with seriousness, and compare them with accuracy, will probably hesitate before you admit the truth of what they call, "their glory and joy."† Should then Christianity, by the promulgation of such doctrines, have received neither accumulation of evidence, nor clearness of illustration, that very purity of which they boast, may be found, upon a nearer view, to be sullied with pride, and disfigured by error.

It is farther urged, that, by the introduction of Methodism, the Gospel is preached by many of the Clergy of our Church in greater purity. If by purity be meant the insisting perpetually on the doctrines of faith, grace, justification, the new-birth, the indwelling of the spirit, communion with God—I reckon not such peculiarities among the excellencies of public instruction. COULD IT INDEED BE PROVED, that instead of preaching mere morality, we have been induced by them to expatiate on the genius of Christianity, on the excellency of its precepts, on the sublimity of its doctrines, on the importance of its sanctions, we would readily acknowledge that some good to Christianity has been *indirectly* produced by the propagation of Methodism. But if the Methodists would

* In this place, and indeed throughout the whole sermon, I include the followers of Mr. Whitfield, who are generally called *Calvinists*, between whom and the adherents of Mr. Wesley, contentions about the doctrines of grace and election have been carried on, which evidently demonstrate what spirit they are of—contentions which would disgrace enlightened heathens. *Tantæne animis cœlestibus iræ?*

† I would earnestly recommend to the reader the attentive perusal of Bishop Lavington's *Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists compared*: he will meet with both amusement and conviction. A pamphlet too, entitled *A REVIEW of the Policy, Doctrines, and Morals of the Methodists*. Sold by Johnson, London, price one shilling.

would be persuaded seriously to read, and impartially to consider the explanations which some of our most illustrious brethren have given of grace, justification, and the new-birth, they would perhaps find that, where they reproach us with indifference, we have been anxious to explain the truth, and where they charge us with errors, we have been fortunate enough to discover it.

They farther boast, that they have not only been the means of evangelizing our discourses, but also of improving our morals. If they have been the instruments of preserving us from the commission of gross vices by their vigilant attention to our conduct, far be it from me to depreciate their claim to our gratitude. But why should they impute to the efficacy of their own example, a fact which may be equally accounted for by the sense which we feel of our duty, by the obedience which we pay to the directions of our Church, and by the progress which we have made in our knowledge of the scriptures?

We acknowledge and lament that, among the ministers of the Church, men have sometimes been found of languid piety, and unstable virtue. But their number, we trust, is not very considerable; and for our moral improvement—if improved we be—it were easy to assign more unequivocal and more adequate causes, than the watchfulness of those who despise, or the opposition of those who revile us. The Clergy, we know, have advanced in practical virtue, as well as speculative knowledge; they share, in common with other men, the advantages of civilization; they acquire, in a state of society, a just sense of decorum, and they preserve it, when acquired, in greater purity, by deep and serious reflections upon the sanctions of religion. It is therefore to be hoped that the morals of the teachers have had some beneficial influence upon the conduct of their hearers; and that, seeing

seeing our lives at no variance with our profession, they have been disposed to listen to us with more attention, and to imitate us with more assiduity.

Another boasted advantage is, that men, who formerly were totally ignorant of the nature of the Christian covenant, are now, since they embraced Methodism, "mighty in the scriptures." That they apply themselves with diligence to the reading of the holy scriptures, we are ready to confess, to approve, and to encourage. And they are, in this respect, a reproach to too many of the members of our Church. But having had no farther education—I speak of the generality—than merely to enable them to read, how can they be supposed to understand with critical nicety, and explain with argumentative precision, those writings, which St. Peter asserts "are hard to be understood?" When you reason with them upon any point of doctrine, they overpower you with quotations, which they call proofs, from the sacred oracles. But the misfortune is, that you are under the necessity of explaining all the passages they produce in support of their opinions; in doing which, the very sight of the original question is, in general, gradually lost. From their ignorance of the scope of the writers—the character of the people to whom those writings are addressed—the style and figures used by the inspired penmen—they apply passages, which, when attentively examined, and thoroughly understood, have no relation whatsoever to the doctrines they are defending. Here their supposed superiority triumphs: for the most learned Divine, according to this mode of reasoning, cannot confute the most illiterate mechanic. If, instead of having their heads busied, and their passions heated by their contemplations on abstruse* subjects, they would engrave on their

* I beg leave to refer the learned reader to an admirable dissertation written by Falster

their hearts, the virtues of meekness, humility, justice, forgiveness, their daily perusal of the scriptures would be then truly laudable—and however we might pity the errors of their understandings, we should applaud the amiableness of their manners, and the rectitude of their conduct.

That Methodism, however, has been productive of some good to society, I could, were it necessary, produce many instances. If any one doubt the truth of what I say, let him enquire of men; on whose veracity he can depend, particularly in the great manufacturing towns, and he will be informed of many, who, immersed in sensuality, and enslaved to vice, have been, by the preaching of Methodism, reclaimed from their evil courses. But Christianity requires active virtue. It is not sufficient that a “man cease to do evil—he is to learn to do well.” The menace

Falster, de majestate sacræ scripturæ non temerè profanandâ.—Minimè pervulgandam ita esse sacram scripturam ut cuncta ejus mysteria, in quibuscumque triviis et compitis, profano vulgo exponantur; eaque apud subsellia rusticorum in disquisitionem veniant, quæ ipsis etiam theologorum tribunalibus negotium facessunt. He goes on thus;—Memento, inquam quantum periculi celeberrima illa et profusa totius sacræ scripturæ lectio habeat, ex quâ tot prævæ et adulterinæ interpretationes sæpe nascantur; ex interpretationibus tot sectæ, quibus orbis christianus miserè distrahitur, affligitur, laceratur. ***. Memento porro ad salutarem Dei cognitionem, ad *πληροφορίαν*, ad salutem satis vulgo esse institutiones catecheticas, justâ et perspicuâ sacrorum oraculorum auctoritate firmatas, ritè et diligenter enucleatas, fideliter ad præscriptum *Legis Regiæ* inculcatas.

What Falster said about the *pictists* in his own country, may be applied to those who among us are known by the name of Methodists; we may confidently tell them, that the Church of England has provided an excellent catechism for the instruction of its members, and we may justly add, that some of its most distinguished teachers, especially Archbishop Secker, have written interpretations of that catechism, sound in their doctrine, perspicuous in their language, and most beneficial in their tendency.

menace of damnation, so often brandished with terror, and levelled with indignation, may restrain men from the open violation of moral duty; but the Gospel requires, that all who embrace it be "rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate." Christianity is not considered by the Methodists as having a sufficiently intimate relation with this world.* For virtue they substitute *holiness*, which consists, not in acts of mercy and benevolence, but sometimes in tedious prayers, sometimes in sudden raptures, and sometimes in gloomy meditations.

I heartily wish that I could consistently and justly add one other SUBSTANTIAL proof of the utility which either Christianity or society may have derived from the propagation of their doctrines; but the man the most attached to their system, and the most solicitous for its success, would not, I am persuaded, by any effort of ingenuity, be able to produce any additional circumstances in its favor. And even some of the advantages I have enumerated—for such they are considered by themselves—appear to be the bewildered reveries of a disordered mind, rather than the judicious suggestions of a sound understanding, and the clear dictates of genuine piety.

In contrasting with them the disadvantages which Methodism has produced, I wish not to excite in you any emotions of contempt towards the people, whose errors and frailties, whilst we record them, we ought, as Christian ministers, seriously to lament.

C II. In

* If religion, says a learned and venerable prelate, is of a nature so entirely different from our worldly concerns, has it therefore no connection with them, and is it so pure as to avoid their intercourse? There have been such tenets, but they do not belong to rational Christianity. Religion has the world for the theatre of its action, and is as intimately connected with it as the soul is with the body.—See a most excellent sermon published by his Grace the Lord Archbishop of York, in 1777.

II. In entering upon my Second Head I am led to observe, that they even ostentatiously profess to be real and true members of the Church of England. Now is the most wanton abuse, the most outrageous contempt of its teachers, consistent with such profession? We preach, it is said, only heathen morality; for God, having withheld from us the power of his grace, *we do not know how to preach the gospel*. In this indiscriminate censure, men of the highest talents, most extensive learning, and irreproachable morals, are comprehended. We are exposed to the most sarcastic ridicule, the severest condemnation, because our understandings resist the absurdity of their opinions; and because we dare not, to conciliate their esteem, preach doctrines which our judgment forbids us to believe, and which our conscience commands us to condemn.

The parochial Clergy, being the guides of the vulgar, and of the ignorant, both in civilized manners, and useful attainments, can a greater outrage be done to society, than to represent us as not only useless, but pernicious to that society we are expected to enlighten by our knowledge, and improve by our example? Is this consistent with Christian charity? Is this the suggestion of that amiable spirit "which thinketh no evil?" Is this one of the fruits of Christianity, whose tendency is to regulate the passions, and to meliorate the heart? How many unhappy wretches have been alienated from the public service of the Church, and have literally "lived without God in the world," by their malicious misrepresentations? When they declaim to the ignorant that they are born of God, and affirm that it is impossible for us, who are not so highly favored, to preach the Gospel—whatever be their views, the consequences are most deplorable. They, no doubt, mean to proselyte men to their own opinions; but if they fail in the attempt, they render them indifferent—so willing are too many to renounce all claim to
 "the

“the things which are not seen”—to that seasonable instruction with which it is the intention of our Church that all her children be supplied, and that rational worship, which, whilst it inspires with piety, preserves from enthusiasm.

They further alledge that our people, by their attendance on divine worship, are not made better. What is this but arrogating to themselves the property of omniscience? Admitting, however, the truth of the assertion—let them consider before they so wantonly destroy the present and future happiness of men—how much worse a nation would become, if it universally adopted the desperate resolution of renouncing the public worship of Almighty God.

But it is here to be remarked, that they are openly counter-acting the effects of the Gospel, and the design of its Author. Jesus Christ expressly commands, that all who profess his religion, commemorate his death in the holy Sacrament. Now to prevent men, either by foul calumnies, or insidious suggestions, from attending at the Lord's Table, is to destroy the efficacy of that divine ordinance, upon every unhappy person whom those calumnies may have irritated, or those suggestions misguided. How this is to be reconciled with an ardent zeal for the honor of God, and the salvation of men, can only be described by their peculiar phraseology, and comprehended by their illuminated minds.

If in the cultivation of the minds of their children, if in impressing just principles, and implanting sound morals, they can shew themselves to be under a divine direction, Methodism will be allowed to have produced happy effects. But the very contrary is notorious. Many of them persuade themselves, it should seem, that their duty towards their children is completely discharged by compel-

ling them to attend the prayers of their family, and the preaching of their assemblies. What is the effect? Meanness and deceit take deep root in their mind, and produce a copious harvest of secret follies, and concealed irregularities. Deprived of rational amusements, wearied with long prayers, disgusted with puritanical conversation, the moment they escape from the hands of their deluded parents, they fall a prey, as is naturally to be expected, to every temptation. They are without prudence, and without virtue. The moral sense is not implanted at all, and a sense of religion has been implanted in vain. I must not omit observing, that the children of the Methodists, if they fail to embrace the religion of their parents, are seldom attached to any mode of worship, or system of belief. From the aversion, which they have contracted at home, to folly or fanaticism, they too often conclude that religion itself is nothing but hypocrisy; and as they are unacquainted with the evidences, and the genius of Christianity; as they have only a few indistinct ideas of original sin, of grace, and justification, floating on their minds, the perusal of those pernicious books, with which every infidel is ready and eager to supply them, renders them at once degenerate in principle, and profligate in practice. Happy were it for both parents and children, if content with "asking for the old paths they had walked therein, that they might have found rest unto their souls! But they" perversely "said, we will not walk therein." Happy for both parents and children, if, instead of being "carried about by every wind of doctrine," they had been content to have attended the service of the Church, and to have appropriated to themselves the blessings of the Altar—they would then "have sown in righteousness, and have reaped in joy!"

For the misery which prevails in many families of the Methodists,

Methodists, incontrovertible reasons may be assigned. Supposing, as they do, that God can only be pleased by our abstaining from the innocent pleasures of life; proclaiming that austerity of manners, and rigour of deportment, are the most acceptable sacrifices which can be offered to him, they shew no indulgence to the common failings of humanity. How much is it to be lamented, that, though there are before their eyes so many who have made shipwreck of the happiness of their families, the adherents to this persuasion should still obstinately persist in following such pernicious steps!

The regulation of the moral temper, and the extinction of the malignant passions, do not, alas! seem to be essential, or even subordinate, parts of their system. For though they persuade themselves that their heart is the actual habitation of God's spirit, yet we do not often perceive the place of his residence adorned with those graces which are pleasing in his sight. Vehemence of temper, uncharitableness of opinion, greediness of gain—are they not among their distinguishing characteristics?

Need I mention one very material injury to society, arising from the preaching of Methodism—the despair of obtaining God's mercy, into which many are plunged; the horrors they experience, by not sensibly receiving, as they are taught to expect, the forgiveness of their sins; and the very unhappy manner in which they sometimes terminate their existence?—thus rushing unbidden into the presence of the Almighty, and leaving sometimes numerous and well-disposed families to deplore their loss! This is an evil from which Methodism cannot be exculpated.

Without presuming to arraign the general politics of the Methodists, I may be allowed to point out the political evils that may flow from their rash hostility to ourselves.

In

In the history of all ages, we may trace the close and baneful connection between religious sects and factious parties. While the imaginations of men rove in the pursuit of ideal perfections; while their passions are irritated by the accidental, and perhaps the unavoidable, defects of human institutions; while their pride, aided by their malignity, grasps at dominion, under the name of freedom, every danger which threatens the tranquility of the State, may eventually shake the foundations of the Church. In our times these observations cannot be slighted as unimportant; and though I mean not to throw out any indiscriminate charges of disloyalty on the great body of the Methodists, I cannot but suggest the mischiefs which may arise from that spirit of strife which they are so very prone to indulge. But the opposition which they carry on against the Clergy, *tends*, surely, to overthrow that very Establishment for which some of them profess the most unfeigned respect. I cannot therefore but warn those sectaries whom I forbear to accuse. The charges of negligence, of hypocrisy, and of libertinism, which they hurl against one very numerous class of religious teachers, may, from unfavorable circumstances, enflame the prejudices, and assist the machinations of those restless innovators, who look with an unfriendly eye upon religion under every form. I cannot but call to their serious recollection the havock which faction, combined with impiety, has made in the public institutions, and private morals, of a neighbouring country. I cannot but remind them that the doctrines and the manners of the Church were most fiercely arraigned by the same wretches, who, in the mad career of their crimes, have trampled upon the "Cross of Christ," denied a state of rewards and punishments, and attempted, at least, to extinguish even the belief of a God. I cannot but entreat them to mingle prudence with zeal, to consider the signs of the times and the seasons, and to beware lest, by precipitate endeavours to disseminate

nate their own favorite tenets, they facilitate the introduction of those licentious and profane opinions, which are alike injurious to Christianity, and society, and which they would appear, in common with ourselves, to dread and to condemn.—If the doctrines of the Gospel be taught *by any of its professors* upon principles which cannot endure the test of enlightened reason, most assuredly we live in an age when the vigilance and activity of our enemies will take advantage of every error in our opinion; every defect in our reasoning, and every impropriety in our conduct. They will argue from the strife of Christians, against the utility, as well as the truth of Christianity itself; they will not be very delicate in examining the grounds of those accusations which they see produced most frequently, and urged most vehemently by the very men who set up the highest pretensions to soundness of faith, and sanctity of character. But the danger which impends over ourselves will ultimately reach our accusers; and therefore, upon every principle of self-preservation, as well as of justice, they would do well to reflect upon the possible consequences of imputations, which, at once, are undeserved by the teachers of the Establishment, and may be fatal to those who affect the greatest solicitude for its purity.

I have now fairly and impartially stated how much Christianity and civil Society are indebted to the propagation of Methodism. I have also, without exaggeration, laid before you some evils which Methodism has failed to correct; and some which it has produced. I have endeavored to strip it of its misrepresentations on the one hand, and its disguises on the other. Whether the good or the evil preponderate, I leave to the determination of your own judgment. It will, however, be necessary to shew farther, why Methodism has so increased, and by what means it is supported; but having detained you so long already, I cannot bestow

Now on this part of my subject, the attention its importance demands.

III. That Methodism has increased more from its flattering doctrines, than its intrinsic excellence, will, I presume, evidently appear.

After subjecting them to a certain state of probation—after permitting them to labor a certain period under the conviction of sin, during which God requires to be sought by deep sighs, melancholy groans,* unceasing prayers; after threatening them with everlasting destruction, *in one single moment*, he speaks unto them, saying—“in a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have compassion on thee,”—when lo! the burden of their sins falls off; though “they were as scarlet, they become white as snow; though they were as crimson, they become as wool.”† Surely there does
not

* These symptoms, says Mr. Wesley, I can no more impute to any natural cause, than to the spirit of God. I make no doubt it was SATAN tearing them as they were coming to Christ. And hence proceeded those grievous cries, &c.—*Wesley's Journal, from 1741 to 1743.*

We find, between Popery and Methodism, a very near affinity. Les preludes d'une conversion, says the eloquent Massillon, ont, je ne sais quoi, des larmes, des combats, des agitations, &c. &c. We drudge with pleasure through the absurd mummery of Flechier, Bossuet, Massillon, &c. because we are abundantly compensated by the taste, the imagination, the *onction* with which some of the French preachers abound.

† I visited a poor woman a mile or two from the town. Her trials had been uncommon; inexpressible agonies of mind, joined with all sorts of bodily pain, not (it seemed) from any natural cause, but *the direct operation of Satan*: Her joys were now as uncommon; she had little time to sleep, having for several months
last

not appear any analogy between the conversion of the Jews and Gentiles, recorded in the New Testament, and the new-birth of the Methodists. It were, before so learned an auditory, superfluous to observe, that it was not a blind and sudden impulse of the mind,* felt by the first converts to Christianity, but the strength of argument, and the power of evidence, urged by the Apostles, which caused them gladly to receive the word, and to be baptized into the profession of Christ's religion. But when the remission of sins is speciously held out to the desponding sinner—when all the circumstances that distinguish the one case from the other, are disguised by the preacher, and overlooked by the hearer—no wonder is it that men, unfurnished with erudition, and unaccustomed to discrimination, should implicitly believe the truth, and ardently wish to experience the blessings of this consolatory doctrine.†

D

They

last past seen, as it were, the unclouded face of God, and praised him day and night.—*Wesley's Journal, from 1749 to 1751.*

* In the first propagation of religion, Bishop Warburton justly remarks, God began with the *understanding*; and rational conviction won the *heart*. When the Holy Ghost fell on the Disciples at the day of Pentecost, the devout men of every nation under heaven, heard them speak in their own tongues. But what? Not the jargon of fanaticism; but the wonderful works of God—*i. e.* they heard them give a rational account of the various parts of God's religious dispensations to mankind. It was just the same on all other occasions. When the spirit first fell upon believers, they prophesied; that is, they explained the scriptures of the Prophets.—*W. on Grace, p. 163.*

† Here, perhaps, says Mr. Archdeacon Rutherford, we shall be told of Paul, who, at his conversion, fell to the earth, and cried out with trembling and astonishment, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? and of the jailor, who fell down trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas, saying, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? But to what purpose are these examples produced? Paul's astonishment,

which

Sent they are of God, they arrogantly and impiously boast, to "bring certain strange things to the ears of men." The truths of the Gospel have been heretofore cast into a barren soil; the sowers have received "the seed of the word into earthen vessels," and by their mixing with it the corruptions of learning, and the refinements of philosophy, have rendered it of none effect. God therefore, to "confound the things of the wise,—has called *them* out "of darkness into his marvellous light," to hallow his name, and to spread abroad his salvation.*

To

which made him fall to the earth, was occasioned not by any clear and distinct perception of the operation of the Spirit within him, but by an external light from heaven: nor was it any secret whisper, which made him cry out, but the voice of Christ speaking to his outward ears, and saying, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And as far as appears from the sacred history, the jailor's emotions were owing to what came under the notion of *his bodily senses*, and not to any *inward feeling* of a Divine influence. He was awakened from sleep by an earthquake; and when he found the prison doors open, he drew his sword, &c. The jailor recollected for what reason the Magistrates had committed Paul and his companion to prison; and rightly concluding that the earthquake and the opening of the doors were the work of God, who gave this testimony to the truth of the Religion which they taught, he was struck by this miracle with a reverential fear, and begged of them to instruct him in the way of Salvation.

It is as little to the purpose to instance those 3000 persons who were converted by St. Peter's preaching. The sacred Historian has written, that they were pricked—that is, had a quick and lively sense of sorrow in their heart. But he has neither written nor intimated that they perceived this to be the work of the Holy Ghost by any inward feeling. For can no one be pricked in the heart without having a clear and distinct perception, that this is done by the Sword of the Spirit?—See *Dr. Rutherford's Charges*.

* Mr. Wesley, as Mahomet had done before him, sanctions his commission by miracles. "My horse was exceeding lame—we could not discern what it was that was amiss, and yet he could scarce set his foot on the ground—My head
"ached

To this overpowering declamation they give additional force, by setting before the unconverted part of their followers, the numerous examples of those sinners whose sins are forgiven, and whose peace is made with God. To have communion with Christ, to converse with God, and to "search all things, even the deep things of God"—how can an ignorant man withstand so fascinating an offer? Their preaching too is enlivened with anecdotes of their adventures; of the numbers converted, some after one manner, and some after another; and of the strong assurances of salvation vouchsafed to a large part of their regenerated followers.*

But the Methodists ingratiate themselves yet further with their casual hearers, by the great attention they give to their singing, in which they are generally allowed to unite what is not sufficiently

D 2

regarded

"ached more than it had done for some months (what I here aver is the naked fact; let every man *account for it* as he sees good.) I then thought, cannot God heal either man or beast, by any means, or *without any*? Immediately my weariness and head ach ceased, and my horse's lameness, *the same instant*. Nor did he halt any more either that day or the next. *A very odd accident this also!*"—*Wesley's Journal, from 1743 to 1746.* *Risum teneatis amici?*

* Samuel Hitchins, a smith by trade, "was taken ill, and caught a malignant fever, whereof he died, in which he cries out, I have not the least doubt of my salvation. He cries out aloud, Open the heaven, O my God, and come down into my soul. Come, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and plunge me into God."

His brother Thomas, a tinner, falls ill of a high fever—addressing himself to the people around him, he says—"Can't you see Jesus Christ coming with an innumerable company of Angels, and the Golden Banner displayed? They are coming to carry me to the bosom of my God. Open their eyes, O God! that they may see them—I am whiter than snow—I am washed in the blood of my Redeemer—Why, I am all God."—*See Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists, Part 3d. p. 93.*

regarded in our Church, melody and devotion. Doubtless, in this part of divine worship, pleasing in itself, and productive of utility, some improvement might be made by the parochial Clergy;* for as harmony is cultivated in our several Churches, in the same degree are our congregations usually increased.

There is another artifice by which their societies are supported, and their hearers multiplied—I mean the periodical change of their preachers. Before the announced period arrives, fame has prepossessed the inhabitants of his district in favor of the new missionary. The conflicts he has sustained with Satan—the many seals the Lord has set to his ministry—the power of his prayers—the efficacy of his preaching—the miracles of his conversion—the advantages of his experience—all are related with conscious triumph, and believed with implicit confidence.

From laudable motives we hope, and we know with distinguished success, they adopt the following expedient both to assemble and conciliate their congregations: After meeting their societies, they become familiarly acquainted with their several hearers, by which means they are enabled, *after their manner*, to relieve their spiritual wants. They introduce into their discourses a copious variety of private and personal matter, in consequence of which their diligence is said to be proved by public demonstration, and their zeal is applauded by individual testimony.

There is another mean of increasing their followers, which I cannot reprobate with sufficient indignation—the unjust reflections

* “ This most pleasing and affecting part of divine service,” says an amiable and distinguished Prelate, “ is now (through a large part of the kingdom at least) rendered almost totally useless to the Church of England, where, on the contrary, one should expect to find it in its highest state of perfection.”—See *Bishop of London's Charge, sold by Rivington.*

tions and scandalous misrepresentations very industriously made of our tenets, and of our preaching. Because we inculcate upon our hearers the necessity of a good life, we are accused of preaching salvation by works,* independent of the covenanted mercy of God through his Son. On the contrary, redemption, we invariably testify, is purchased to the whole human race by the sacrifice and death of Christ; but we further contend that, unless we fulfil the conditions of it, we shall not be entitled to its blessings.

Such are the means more immediately used by themselves to increase their followers, and support their societies. But we will proceed to consider some other circumstances, which may have probably contributed to the establishment of Methodism.

One cause, which exceedingly promotes its success, is the very little religious intercourse which is too often found to subsist between the pastor and his flock, in our own Church. The preachers among the Methodists maintain a regular communication with their people; they enquire how far their sermons are understood from the pulpit, and what improvement they produce on the minds of their hearers. Unless we in some degree renew the pastoral intercourse with our parishioners which our forefathers maintained, our ministerial labors will not, I fear, be very successful, and Methodism will assuredly continue to increase. For however we may be distinguished by our knowledge of human nature, our discourses cannot be adapted to the moral exigencies of our respective flocks, if we are content with giving only those instructions which are delivered from the pulpit. I will not examine how far vanity may induce other men to ascertain the impressions made by their supposed eloquence; but, beyond all question, the regular Clergy, from better motives than vanity, may employ private enquiry in tracing out the efficacy of public admonition.

The

* See Rotherham's admirable Treatise on FAITH.

The very circumstance of preaching is, indeed, a powerful cause, and it has a proportionate effect in the increase of Methodism. The subjects of our sermons are not always judiciously chosen; the understandings of our hearers are not always exactly consulted; the lamentable consequence of which is, that many people absent themselves from Church with a stupid indifference to religion, or a contemptuous disregard of its evidences, and of its authority.

There is another cause which contributes to the propagation and success of Methodism. In too many parts of this kingdom, though the parishes be large, and the congregations numerous, the duty of our Church is thought to be discharged by preaching a sermon only in the morning. Now it often happens that a considerable part of a parish cannot attend divine worship but in the afternoon. When that is the case, and it occurs very frequently, many well meaning persons are deprived of those comforts, which they are not incapable of feeling, and of those exhortations which they may be disposed to follow. I here, my Reverend Brethren, make an honest and direct appeal to your consciences. If such men, desirous of that instruction which is refused them in the Church, unite themselves to any other society of Christians, can they be said to incur the censure of "heaping to themselves teachers, having itching ears?" Would to God this were duly considered by us! Almost all other denominations of Christians preach at least twice in the day—ought we, without very urgent necessity, to plead exemption? "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, whether this, or that, or whether they both shall be alike good." I do not mean that we should *preach* two discourses, but that we should, in the afternoon, deliver, which is the most
to

to be wished, a catechetical Lecture.* Our Churches would be more regularly attended—the Lord's day would be more religiously observed in our several parishes—and the plea of frequenting conventicles, to gain intelligible and wholesome instruction, would be more fully refuted.

What now remains, my Reverend Brethren, but that we each of us seriously appeal to our consciences, whether by our negligence or inattention, divisions have crept in, and Methodism, of consequence, has made any progress in our several parishes ! From the rustic who forsakes his plow, and from the mechanic who

* Before the introduction of School-divinity into the pulpit, the Clergy, it seems, used a way of preaching similar to that which I recommend—it was called *posillating*, and those who used it were called *posillators*. “ This consisted in explaining a large portion of Scripture, sentence after sentence, in the regular order in which the words lay, making short practical reflections on each sentence. In this age, when it was usual to give every Doctor a name expressive of his peculiar excellence, Cardinal Hugo excelled so much in this way of preaching, that he got the name of the *authentic posillator*. This ancient method of public instruction is still used in some foreign Churches, and in the Church of Scotland, under the name of *lecturing*.”—See *Henry's History of England*, vol. 8th, 183d page, 800.

I am informed by an intelligent Minister of the Church of Scotland, that by the Acts of Assembly, every Clergyman is enjoined to explain some passage of Holy Writ to his hearers, on the forenoon of every Sabbath day. And this order is almost universally obeyed. Lecturing, he adds, is, and justly, regarded by the Church of Scotland, as much more beneficial to the bulk of the people than preaching.

Might not this custom of lecturing be renewed with advantage in our Church, sometimes by Explanations of the Church-Catechism, and sometimes by Comments on those historical and prophetic parts of the Old Testament, or on those chapters in the writings of St. Paul, which are appointed for the Lessons of the Day, and which often produce the most perplexing embarrassment, or the most dangerous errors in the minds of unlearned hearers ?

“ I have

who rushes from his loom, to dogmatize upon those subjects which have perplexed the most enlightened of the sons of men, we withhold, and are justified in withholding, our approbation. We are bound to detect their errors, to check their rashness, and to resist their uncharitableness. But we are also required to "take heed unto ourselves." We must beware, lest, in performing the duties of our sacred office, we suffer our minds to be seduced by pleasure, enslaved by avarice, or relaxed by indolence. In proportion as we are more qualified to counteract the wild and delusive tenets of illiterate and presumptuous teachers, the greater will be our guilt, and the heavier will be our punishment, if the Almighty should say unto us, "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran; I have not spoken, yet they prophesied."

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all glory, honor and praise. AMEN:

"I have frequently taken occasion, in the course of my ministry," says the late excellent Dp. Horne, "to explain a Psalm from the Pulpit; and whenever I have done so, whether the audience were learned or unlearned, polite or rustic, I have generally had the happiness to find the discourse, in an especial manner, noticed and remembered."—See *Preface to Comment. on Psalms*.

I know a learned and most valuable friend who always explains to his congregations such passages in the Psalms and Lessons, as he thinks likely to leave any painful or dangerous doubts on their understandings. He tells me that those explanations, which he gives occasionally in the pulpit, always excite a very unusual degree of attention, and are productive, he believes, of useful effects.

I offer no apology for these observations, because I am exceedingly solicitous to see the custom of lecturing, where there is not a sermon in the afternoon, UNIVERSALLY ESTABLISHED. With respect to the quotations with which the pages are crowded, I hope they will be considered as both elucidating my subject, and enforcing my arguments.

18 AU 65

